

Harmonious Coexistence: The Ecological Narrative Turn of Chinese Ethnic Minority-themed Animation in the New Century

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Abstract: In the new century, with the spreading of global ecological crisis, the narrative core of Chinese minority animation works has begun to pay more and more attention to the expression of ecological and ethical relationship between ethnic groups, modern society and natural traditions, and has begun to strengthen the inheritance and development of national ecological culture and ecological concepts in the medium of animation, which is important to explore the ecological humanistic spirit and values in national animation art. In addition, the narrative core has begun to reshape the ecological ethical and social development concept of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature. Based on narrates and aesthetic psychology. Based on narratology and aesthetic psychology, this paper analyzes the historical background and specific artistic characteristics of Chinese animation works turning to national ecological narration since the new century, summarizes the correlation between the law of artistic creation and the audience's aesthetic perception, and discusses the value connotation of using artistic media to alleviate the current human ecological crisis. Finally, it looks forward to the future prospects of the integration between the ecological narration of ethnic minority animation and the construction of ecological civilization in China in the new era. The ecological narrative shift of national animation works in the new era will promote the enhancement of ecological humanistic spirit and ecological values of the audience.

Keywords: Harmonious Coexistence; New Century; Chinese Ethnic Minority Theme Animation; Ecological Narrative

1. Introduction

Minority-themed animation is an important part of China's animation nationalization, which has presented many classic works and national aesthetic styles in the early period of the founding of New China, i.e. the new period of reform and opening up. However, since entering the new century, with China's accession to the World Trade Organization, the market environment with more frequent interaction with the world has provided a strong external impetus for domestic economic development. The economic model of ethnic minority regions has also begun to accelerate the transformation, accompanied by the ecological destruction of the rough development, environmental pollution and other issues, breaking the original ecological balance of ethnic minority regions, becoming a core factor restricting sustainable development, triggering a profound reflection on the reality of the plight of survival, ecological narrative themes have also become an important artistic direction for the creation of animation of ethnic minority themes in the new century. Animation is an inherent form of artistic expression that is close to the nature of human innocence, and has a more unique media advantage in shaping ecological consciousness. Through fantasy, exaggeration, wit, absurdity and other artistic techniques, animation shows the audience an "unreal world" with strange, interesting and beautiful, which is constructed by human beings but detached from the objective constraints of the human real world, and re-examines the ecological existence of the natural world from the viewpoint of artistic creation, and strengthens the presentation of all kinds of life characters. With a high degree of imagination and technical expressiveness, it has constructed an ecological narrative space of "all things have spirits" and "pro-life", and

has also provided a more energetic media carrier for the dissemination of national ecological culture.

2. Ethnic Ecological Cultural Inheritance in the Medium of Animation

In the middle of the 20th century, the American anthropologist J.H. Steward put forward the concept of "ecological culture", aiming to sort out the dialectical and unified relationship between culture and ecosystems, which is mainly reflected in the norms, beliefs and ways of human beings' attitudes towards nature as the main body of culture. In the context of specific geographical, social and historical realities, the main body of "ecological culture" has obvious national attributes, reflecting the relationship between the cultural forms of specific ethnic groups and the regional ecology. "Ethnic ecological culture is the culture of understanding, utilizing and managing the ecosystem in which each ethnic group is located in the course of its long-term historical and social development; this culture contains the concepts and beliefs of each ethnic group about the ecological environment, as well as the knowledge, techniques and systems of each ethnic group for protecting and utilizing natural resources, and is the understanding and contemplation of the ecosystem by each ethnic group" [1]. Ethnic scholar He Xingliang believes that totem worship occupies an important position in the development and change of China's ethnic minorities, and is an important foundation for understanding the traditional culture of ethnic minorities[2]. The commonality of totem worship among ethnic groups is that they regard certain animals, plants, inanimate objects, or natural phenomena as relatives or ancestors of the ethnic groups, in order to strengthen the blood relationship between the two, such as the wolf totem of the Mongols, the eagle totem of the Tajiks, the maple leaf totem of the Miao people, the bamboo totem of the Buyis, the water totem of the Dai people, and the fire totem of the Hani people, and so on, and each ethnic group's objects of worship are rich and colorful, for example, the Yunnan For example, the Yi people in Lukui Mountain Dazhai in Xinping take plants, animals and artifacts such as gourd, colorful plantain, fine sprouts, camphor, sheep, buffalo, black turtle dove,

green turtle dove and pig trough as their clan totems.

The rich and diversified totem consciousness of various ethnic groups not only embodies the environmental characteristics of the natural ecology of various ethnic regions, but also reflects the ecological ethical thinking of ethnic minorities of adapting to nature and living in harmony with nature, which has become the image carrier of ethnic identity and cultural identity, and has been integrated into the daily life of ethnic groups with some kind of figurative ornamental patterns, folk rituals, myths and legends, or folk music, providing a source of living water for the creation of ethnic minority animation. Whether originating from folk murals, rock paintings, architectural carvings, body ornaments, totem patterns and other art styles, or using background music of national instruments such as the horse-head qin, dongbura, lusheng, or from folklore texts such as national epic poems, narrative poems, as well as myths and legends, almost every animation depicting the national life style and portraying the national psychology and emotion contains rich and profound ecological philosophies. These vivid cultural symbols with original ecological temperament and national romanticism are also the important support for the animation medium to reappear national memories and national emotions, and bring the public closer to the emotional distance of the national ecological cultural field.

Although, the ecological tradition of ethnic minorities highlights the close relationship between ethnic groups and nature, it is undeniable that animation narratives still need to be creatively transformed into creative practices between the ecological concepts of ethnic traditions and the humanistic connotations of the development of the times. The French literary theorist Dana believes that the creative activity of the artist is not isolated, and that the spiritual and customary conditions of the times are fundamental to the production of works of art and artists, which play a decisive role[3]. The spirit of the times is the core element of the cohesive refinement and artistic sublimation of the national ecological humanities in animation art, which is not only a change in the micro level of creation technology, dissemination form and audience group, but also more importantly a

reorganization of the intrinsic value and dissemination significance of the national ecological humanities thought from the perspective of the macroscopic era development. In the primitive view of nature and nature worship of ethnic minorities, the idea of symbiosis and co-prosperity between human beings and all living things is embedded, and the concept of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature has been nurtured and developed, and the protection of animals and plants, love of the environment, and harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature have been demanded in various forms in the national customary law and other ecological and ethical resources[4].

Through multi-level construction of narrative perspective, metaphorical expression of spatial images, realistic mapping of characters and other narrative strategies, animation media presents ecological themes, interprets the dual relationship between man and nature, and promotes and disseminates the ecological concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature[5]. In the transformation of animation media, integrating the humanistic spirit of the times into the selection and adaptation of national ecological traditional theme texts can give full play to the narrative characteristics of animation media and also strengthen the inheritance value of national ecological culture.

3. The Ecological Narrative Turn of Chinese Ethnic Minority Animation in the New Century

Since the new century, along with the vigorous support of national policies, the development of animation with minority themes has ushered in a new boom. In 2006, the Outline of Cultural Development Plan for the Eleventh Five-Year Plan Period of the State explicitly pointed out that it would focus on the support of the creation of animation with minority themes. A number of excellent minority animation works have won important awards in the international arena, such as "Xiling Snow" won the Grand Prize of the Jury of Asian Youth Animation Competition, and "Legend of Miao King" won the First Prize of Asian Animation in the 10th Digital Content Competition in Tokyo, Japan. Although ethnic minority animation has made certain

achievements in terms of industrial development and the number of works, facing the import of strong cultural values from the United States and Japan and the mature operation of the animation industry system, it also highlights the pressure of ethnic minority animation's survival in the market, as well as the anxiety about the main culture and other problems. However, in the more realistic animation works on the subject of minority ecological narratives, it still reflects the deep thinking of animation art on the ecological predicament of various ethnic groups and the intertwining and collision of the development of modern society, and it looks at and reflects on the grand theme of survival, reproduction and development of the ethnic groups from the perspectives of the nature of human beings and the root of the ethnic groups.

Endangered biological species, deteriorating living environment and the life of ethnic groups in ecological dilemmas are the humanistic reflections on the ecological crisis in the animation narratives of ethnic minorities, which profoundly reflect on the shortcomings of the anthropocentric mode of social development, and project the essence of human nature under the ecological crisis from the viewpoint of life, reflecting on the heavy evils of the nature that nurtures life and nourishes everything, which is ravaged and trampled upon by human beings. In *Xiling Snow* (2007, Zang), an animated film based on the endangered chiru, an ethical conflict between a poacher's father, his child, and the chiru is constructed. In the face of the chiru being shot and the child being swallowed up by the sand pit, the repentant father eventually transforms himself from a poacher to a protector of the chiru, demonstrating mankind's sense of self-salvation for the destruction of the ecological balance. In *The Legend of Loulan in the West* (2014, Uyghur), Princess Loulan leads the people to fight tenaciously against the sandstorm that ravages the city of Loulan, which promotes the consensus of responsibility of human unity and collaboration in the face of ecological crises, while in *The Adventure of Avanti* (2018, Uyghur), the crisis of water shortage plaguing the city of Grapevine causes the national resourceful character Avanti to take on another burden of retrieving the water source for the ethnic group, which also reflects the Uyghur

people's urgent desire to seek national wisdom to solve their real-life dilemmas.

In the social framework dominated by industrial civilization, the reinforced concrete urban structure has bound the emotional interaction between human beings and nature, and the cold steel machine has dissolved the empathetic consciousness of human beings, but the ethnic minorities, due to their unique regional environment and not yet fully developed industrial form, still retain the primitive emotions of human beings towards natural species. In the animation of ethnic minorities, breaking the traditional creative practice of taking human beings as the core of the narrative, the narrative perspective is shifted to the objects such as animals and plants in the common living space, and through the cross-species emotional ties between human beings and animals and plants, we reflect on the ecological values that have gradually been distorted in the human society. By focusing on the emotional companionship and common growth of natural beings such as animals or plants towards humans, it awakens humans to re-examine the value of the existence of other species in the natural world. In *Ulaanqiqiq* (2006, Mongolian), a fantastical narrative in which the sisters Ulaan and Qiqiqiq grow up together with animals such as the white horse Bayar, the shepherd dog Arsleng, and the eagle Toya, recreates the life of the Mongolian people in the midst of the grassland ecology. *The Legend of Deer's Back to the Head* (2010, Li), adapted from the Li folklore of love, combines the multiple emotions of friendship, kinship, and love in the narrative relationship between man, god, and deer, reflecting the Li people's special feelings for deer. In *Dorji* (2011, Zang), Dorji kills the Rakshasa that threatens the grassland despite the danger and sacrifices himself to save Tian Jin, sublimating the friendship between animals and human beings with the righteousness of life.

The construction of a harmonious symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature is a prerequisite for the continuation of human life and prosperity in the homeland of the Earth. The Chinese nation has a cultural

tradition of respecting and loving nature, and the Chinese civilization, which has been inherited for more than 5,000 years, has nurtured the noble pursuit of "Harmony between Nature and Man" and "Taoist Nature". In the promotion of the concept of harmonious coexistence of man and nature, minority nationality animation focuses on the deep knowledge of the harmonious coexistence of man and nature through the unique regional narrative perspective. In *Little Girl Drolma* (2008, Zang), the monster "Poisonous Spider" becomes the role of hunting the chiru, while the human being represented by the girl Drolma becomes the main body of protecting the chiru, internalizing the awareness of ecological protection of nature as the innate mission of human beings, strengthening the relationship between human beings and nature. In *Mila Zizi* (2007, Zang), the creators use the perspective of an innocent child and the modeling style of the Guge murals to recreate the primitive realm of harmony and innocence between human beings and nature as seen in the folktales. In *Colored Yunan* (2009, Bai, Dai and other ethnic groups), through Xiao Xuan's fantastic adventures, and with the sincerity, unity, strength and perseverance of his partners from various ethnic groups, he launches a magical journey to save Colored Yunan and recreate a beautiful and harmonious home, reinforcing the narrative theme of the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature.

4. The Creation Prospect of Minority Animation under the Background of Ecological Civilization Construction in the New Era

The core of ecological civilization is to build a new form of society in which human beings and nature coexist harmoniously, in a virtuous cycle, and develop sustainably; it is a great practice that concerns the survival of the nation and the destiny of mankind. Deeply integrate the concept of ecological civilization into all aspects and the whole process of economic, political, cultural and social construction, fundamentally reverse the trend of ecological and environmental deterioration, ensure the sustainable development of the Chinese nation, and make our due contribution to global ecological security. In the new era to promote the construction of ecological

civilization in-depth the key period, to ethnic perspective, ecological theme to expand the creative vision of minority animation, not only is the reasonable protection of minority ecological and cultural resources and revitalization of the use, but also improve the animation industry system, enhance the influence of China's animation brand is an important exploration. The spirit of national culture contained in national cultural resources has cultural sharing, which can better promote creative content products to break through the market boundaries, so as to go global [6]. The cultural tradition of ethnic minorities of adapting to nature and immersing themselves in nature is a way of abandoning the utilitarian consciousness of "anthropocentricity" and moving from "plundering nature" to "adapting to nature", It is the ideological guideline to abandon the utilitarian consciousness of "human-centeredness", shift from "plundering nature" to "adapting to nature" and "integrating into nature", and pursue harmonious coexistence with nature. Therefore, in addition to focusing on the "public value" and "public spirit" of ecological narratives, animation art should explore the spiritual core of traditional national culture, tell the "Chinese ecological story" with the characteristics of national culture, and show the wisdom and charm of oriental culture.

Minority animation should give full play to the diversity of ecological cultures of various ethnic groups, and reshape the ecological values of human beings with differentiated narrative construction. The essence of the global ecological crisis lies in the loss of ecological consciousness of human beings, which has led to the rough development of human civilization breaking through the tolerance limit of the natural world. Only by changing the current production and consumption patterns, especially the ecological values and lifestyles of human beings, can we realize the sustainable development of human beings and the environment. From primitive totems to tortoise shell divination, from witchcraft to sacrifices to heaven and earth, ethnic minorities have an innate tendency to interact with nature, forming a cultural tradition and unique paradigm of respecting, utilizing and protecting nature. In the coexistence of diversity of ecosystems and diversity of

cultural types, in order to utilize the ecosystems for survival, development and continuity, human beings need to reach a balance between culture and ecology, and to achieve the coupling of culture and natural systems [7]. Therefore, minority animation creation should go deep into the roots of its national culture, explore the cultural thought constructs of body and mind, survival and faith, self and other, human and nature, and seek the spiritual fulcrum of balance between human and nature with the progressive dimensions of life, survival and ecology.

Minority animation should dig deep into the ecological cultural resources of the symbiosis between the nation and nature, and show the consciousness of "community of life" between man and nature with fantasy animation audio-visual symbols, and reconstruct the ecological ethical relationship between man and nature. General Secretary Xi pointed out that "human beings and nature are a community of life, and human beings must respect nature, adapt to nature and protect nature." The spatial alienation from nature, as well as the self-centered identity anxiety of human beings, has prompted human beings to seek the spiritual world of "Harmony between Nature and Man" in their hearts. "Through the spiritual path of nature worship and totem beliefs, ethnic minorities have cultivated the closeness between human beings and nature, and established a harmonious order of symbiosis with nature"[8]. Especially in the creation myths of many ethnic minorities, it is mentioned that human beings and nature are the "common origin" of life, for example, in the "Legends of the Sky, the Earth and the People" of the Hani ethnic group, it is mentioned that human beings and animals such as tigers, eagles and dragons are all the siblings of the founder "Tapa", and in the "Maple Wood Song" of the Miao ethnic group, human beings are the "common source" of life. In the Song of the Maple Tree of the Miao, the originator of human beings, gods and beasts, "Meibangmeiliu", originated from the maple tree. Minority animation should respect nature, adapt to nature, and protect nature from an ecological perspective, focus on in-depth excavation of national and regional myths and legends, and avoid falling into "biocentrism" while correcting the shortcomings of "anthropocentrism" in creation. In the process

of creation, we should not only correct the shortcomings of "anthropocentrism" but also avoid falling into the extreme of "biocentrism", and construct a harmonious ecological ethical outlook.

The creation of minority animation should pay attention to the absorption and integration of emerging technologies, and enhance the ecological aesthetic perception of animation images with the help of technological advantages. The upgrading and iteration of animation creation technology in the new era constantly optimizes and enhances the aesthetic experience of the audience, especially the application of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, digital interaction, motion capture, stereoscopic projection and other emerging digital technologies, which greatly enhances the degree of simulation of animation constructing the virtual ecological world. "With the development of science and technology, the evolution of modern visual production tools and visual production means, human visual exploration and representation ability has long exceeded the limit of human's own visual cognitive ability" [9]. Especially in the natural landscape of ethnic regions, the fine degree of characterization, ethnic costumes, ethnic dances and other details of the presentation, the emerging technology can synthesize the auditory, visual, and even tactile and other dimensions, which brings a more interactive and immersive aesthetic experience for animation works, strengthens the audience's systematic and holistic aesthetic perception of the virtual eco-world in animation images, and greatly expands the ecological charm of the ethnic culture. It greatly expands the ecological space for the charm of national culture.

Minority animation should give full play to the imaginative media advantage of animation, and use the characteristics of national culture to develop a deep dialog between "human society" and "natural environment", and tell the "Chinese ecological story" well. The ideology of a movie does not state or reflect on its culture in a direct way. It is hidden in the film's narrative structure and the various discourses it employs, including images, myths, conventions and visual styles [10]. Although ecological issues transcend the ideologies of races, ethnic groups, nations, and countries, and are grand issues of human

survival, humanistic elements such as ethnicity, values, social customs, and spiritual beliefs are cultural arenas that must be confronted by human beings when responding to systemic issues such as ecological salvation and protection. Through the animation medium, the national ecological narrative is closely connected with human destiny in the form of value concepts, image symbols and emotional memory of ethnic groups, and the ideal home for human poetic dwelling is constructed from the aesthetic perspective of oriental art, so as to awaken the public from the appreciators of "intimate" natural beauty to the participants in the construction of ecological landscapes. It awakens the public from being "close to" the admirers of natural beauty to being "constructors" of ecological landscapes, shapes the collective consciousness of ecological responsibility of human beings, and strengthens the ecological value of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature.

5. Conclusion

In the post epidemic era, the crisis and challenges between man and nature are still severe, the intertwining and collision of traditional national ecological culture and modern social development concepts are still intense, and the production and life style of human society is also facing great changes. Protecting the ecology is protecting people's livelihood, and the ecological concern and interpretation of ethnic animation in the process of social development has made the traditional ecological culture of multi-ethnicity to be inherited and disseminated, multi-ethnicity emotional exchanges to be fused and sublimated, and the ecological thinking and awareness of ecological protection to be infiltrated and penetrated into the popular groups. A beautiful China where human beings coexist harmoniously with nature has become an important goal for the construction of a strong country. In the grand journey of ecological civilization construction, minority animation should further expand the connotation of ecological value in the national culture, build media carriers with local cultural consciousness with aesthetic perspective full of vitality of the times, tell "China's ecological story", stimulate the national ecological consciousness and cultural self-confidence, and forge the ecological and humanistic spirit

of the new era.

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